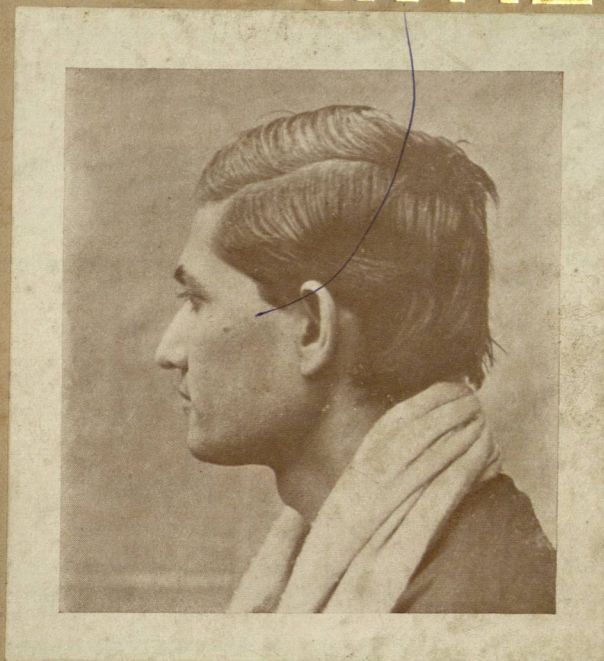


# MODERN INDIAN ARTISTS



ASIT HALDAR  
BY J.H. COUSINS.



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COU







SITA IN ASOKE GROVE.



**PLATE I.**  
**SÎTÂ IN ASHOKA GROVE.**  
**(Collection of Mr. Prafulla Nath Tagore, Calcutta.)**





# MODERN INDIAN ARTISTS

VOLUME TWO

## ASIT KUMAR HALDAR

By

JAMES H. COUSINS

D. Lit., Keio University, Japan.

With Annotations on the Plates By

ORDHENDRA COOMAR GANGOLY.



With 5 Colour Plates And 20 Photogravures



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**TO**  
**Dr. RABINDRA NATH TAGORE.**





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Dr. R. N. Tagore).





## FOREWORD.

In issuing the second volume in this series of studies of Modern Indian Artists we are fortunate in procuring the collaboration of a critic eminently gifted with sympathy and a discriminative insight rare among the ever growing circle of students and votaries of Indian Art. If the mantle of the late Sister Nivedita has fallen on anybody it is on the graceful shoulders of Dr. Cousins. And after the passing of that eminent person who "dedicated" (Nivedita) her life and soul to the study of Indian culture, none has come out to India with greater reverence for the ideals that it stands for, than this poet of the new Irish Renaissance. Through the interpretation of such sympathetic minds the works of the modern Indian painters reveal their hidden significance. At any rate the introduction of the works of Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar to a wider public yet unacquainted with them, through the appreciative words of Dr. Cousins, will help to explain the reasons for our choosing the less known artists of the Calcutta school in representing the character of the new movement in





Indian painting. While we have not been accused of parading mediocrity, we have certainly been taken to task by many of our friends for devoting the first few volumes to the "petites maitres" of Modern Indian Painting. Indeed our earlier tributes to the younger members of the group do not mean any aspersions on the leaders of the movement,—Tagore and Bose, to whom the volumes that are to follow will be devoted. When a movement is vital its leading exponents use the same tongue as its youngest representative. The relation of the "petite maitre" to the great master is one of a degree of experience or a maturity of expression — not in the quality of thought. When you touch life you cease to be mediocre. For mediocrity is the compliment which death pays to life. On the other hand there comes in the life of every people a blessed epoch when all become resplendent at once. We cannot claim yet that we are in the midst of such an epoch although many of our friends think that we are on the threshold of it.

Our acknowledgments are due to the Hon'ble Mr. P. R. Das, Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Mr. Prafulla Nath Tagore, Mr. H. Roychowdhury, Dr. Coomaraswamy, Mr. Leonard Jennings, Mr. Telang, and Mr. S. V.





## CORRIGENDA.

Page one, line eleven, for '1919' read '1909'.

Page five, line eleven, for 'of heavenly' read 'of the heavenly'.

Page nine, last line, page ten, first line, read "exquisite integration of mythology and nature. If an artist born in the Christian tradition.....".

Page ten, line eleven, after 'himself' change comma to fullstop.

Page twelve, line four, delete final 'a'.

Page thirteen, line five, for 'imitation' read 'invitation'; line sixteen, for 'deluged' read 'deluge of'; last line but one, for 'any' read 'another'.

Page fourteen, line one, for 'this' read 'his'; line twentythree, insert a comma after 'destroys it'; line twenty five, insert a semi-colon after 'mind'.

Page sixteen, line fifteen, for 'in' read 'is'.





Ramasamy Mudeliar, the owners of  
the various originals which are here  
reproduced by their courtesy.

O. C. G.

1st September 1923.  
12-1, Gangoly Lane,  
Calcutta.





A certain eminent art critic, annotating a book of reproductions of pictures by Eastern artists, in which he had included Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar's 'Apsarâ', noted the obvious influence of Ajanta in this picture. Now it happened that the picture of the dancing 'Apsarâ' was done by Mr. Haldar some time before he went with Mr. Nanda Lal Bose and others on Lady Herringham's epoch-making expedition (1919-1911) to the rock-temples of Ajanta to make copies of the frescoes which had survived time, climate and vandalism. It also happens that, despite his beautiful reproductions in water colour of two of the cave frescoes, Mr. Haldar left Ajanta behind him, and in the subjects of his choice and his method of presenting them, has given it a wide berth. His two reproductions of the frescoes were purely human—a girl with a fly-flapper, and the purification of a prince. He has made his salutation to Divinity in three pictures of Shri Krishna, a couple concerning Mahâdeva, and one

One





of the Lord Buddha. He has escaped theology, almost escaped the "Purâṇas," and has earned a distinctive place in the heirarchy of Indian artists as a painter who, whether dealing with mythology and symbolism, with history or with humanity and nature, invests his work with a pervasive sense of the intermingling of the human spirit with the Divine Spirit.

And yet, while the art critic was quite out in his hazard as to the Ajantan influence in Mr. Haldar's 'Apsarâ', he was right in a very real and deep sense, in the sense that no artist (and particularly no artist endowed with the aesthetic and mental responsiveness of Mr. Haldar and his fellows in the modern Bengal School) can escape the characteristic current in the ocean of their racial consciousness. The influence of the Buddhist fresco (if 'influence' it can be called) is more explicit in his touching composition of 'Guha and Râma'—where the hero embraces the 'untouchable' and demonstrates that one touch of human nature makes the whole world kin (Pl. XIII.)

The more I see of oriental art, and the more I brood on it with a view to apprehending (if I can) its secret, the more clearly I realise that there is an







# DANCING APSARĀ.

*By the courtesy of Dr. Coomaraswamy & the Editor of the "Orient"*



Indira Gandhi National  
Centre for the Arts



angle of art-vision in the East which is fundamentally distinct from the angle of art vision of the West. By fundamental distinction I do not mean matters of technique, such as the Indian preference for water-colour, or of mannerism, such as the slender waist and snaky finger of Ajanta, or of physical vision, such as the posture and perspective that are a bewilderment to the non-eastern eye which looks for what it regards as truth to nature. I mean an attitude of the spirit, a difference of direction which while it may meet somewhere on the thither side of the sphere of reality, is, at our line of longitude, as distinct as the direction of east and west—as distinct also, as the crystallising polar regions of art, and art's volatilising tropics. Deeper than subject and method in art is the controlling central direction of a people's philosophy of life. The emotional quality, the mental significance the very turn of the wrist of non-Asian art, are coloured, furnished and guided by the concept of a single earth life, beginning at birth and passing through death to a state of eternal fixity in bliss or misery. Even where art is agnostic, its agnosticism is a reaction to the general view of life and life hereafter; its denial is shaped and tintured by what it denies. Anti-

### Three





Christian art is Christian art in a posture of negation.

So is it also with regard to Asian art in its Indian phase which includes the early art of China, Korea and Japan. Below its patient, reposeful, sober, impersonal exterior; below its feeling, whose vibrations are often so subtle as to be imperceptible to those who respond to slower and more obvious wave-lengths; below its intellectual assumptions, which are not bound upon the forehead of wrinkled speculation, but twisted with the convolutions of the brain and passed into the essential stuff of thought; there is the concept of a single life—not a single personal life on the earth, but One Life elaborating itself through the wonderful multiplicity and variety of form in nature and humanity, and smiling with a joy that is reflected in the soul of the artist when he apprehends and registers some juxtaposition of apparently discrete elements in the detail of life and so comes upon the secret of her unity.

This concept shines through the art of Ajanta. It also illuminates the art of Bengal today—not because the Bengal artists have, rightly, drawn from the true fountain-head of their art in some measure, but because the one idea nourishes and inspires both. The great Buddhist

Four





art of over twelve centuries ago is one with modern Hindu Art, even where it has divested itself of theology and ritual, as is largely the case in the work of Asit Kumar Haldar. The pressure towards the central idea of the essential unity of life is inescapable and shows itself under many aspects. Buddhism was Hinduism shorn of its heaven-ascending wings. Hindu art today is Buddhist art readmitted to the presence of heavenly heirarchy with appropriate ceremonial. It is so also in the general life of India. Superficially it is kaleidoscopic; essentially it is telescopic, the concentric circles of the present and intermediate eras enfolding the small glass of deep vision. With a turn of the head one can pass, in an Indian Street, from today to three thousand years ago—from the flash and stench of an automobile to the trudging figure of one in the unbroken line of chanters of the Vedas, clad in beads and loin cloth and the odour of sanctity. There is no clash in the mind that knows. The vision of the seers was vertical. It saw the meshes of evolution through which the particularisations of the future were sifted. The "vimāna" of Rama crossed the skies between India and Ceylon (if not in actual physical fact, at least in real anticipation) centuries before the Greek

Five





Dædalus set wings on the shoulders of his son, or Leonardo da Vinci nearly killed his servant in trying to do the same. In India the ancient is up-to-date in anticipation and the up-to-date is the ancient fulfilled. The discoveries of Jagadish Chandra Bose are but annotations to the Upanishads, elaborations from the root principle of their life and his—"There is no truth apart from the unity of things."

Hence it comes to pass that in making a survey of the work of any one of the major artists of the modern Bengal School one has a feeling that the whole School is squatting around the central figure of the moment, and that one has to address it (as Queen Victoria complained that Gladstone addressed her) as a public meeting with Rajputana and the Kangra Valley to left and right of the middle foreground, and the caves of Ajanta in the background.

But while there is this essential unification underlying the whole history and range of Indian painting, there is a characteristic differentiation between the works of the various artists. Mr. Haldar is among the colour-poets of the Bengal school, not after the dramatic and epic manner of that master of tenuous strength, Nanda Lal Bose, but after the lyrical





manner of his own sensitive and rhythmical genius which has expressed itself in a gallery of beautiful paintings in water-colour and of brush drawings of wonderful fineness.

I have seen many of his original pictures. I have seen practically all of them in adequate reproductions. I have talked over art and its significances with him and his fellow artists under the moon in the congenial atmosphere of that home of poetry and painting, Shantiniketan, with the world's song-master, Rabindranath, not far away; and looking back over a year of time and a thousand miles of distance, I have with me, as I think of Mr. Haldar's art, a sense of delicate beauty, of exquisite reserve, of high significance. His pair of lotus panels (Pl XII) are a pure offering to the Spirit of Beauty, conceived in the same mood of worship as the lotus-offering figure in 'Worshipper'. I recall as examples of his reserve his water-colour picture of a poor mother and her child in a rainstorm [Pl XIV]. Mother's love is in the arm and hand that give compassionate, though inadequate, shelter to her baby from the thick slant lines of a tropical shower. The patience and faith of India are in the quiet, unanxious eyes that seem to see to the end of

Seven





the shower—eyes that are metaphors of the permanence of vision that sees calm beyond the transient fury of the storm. The captive woman ("The Prize of War") sits patiently in the tent awaiting destiny. The dancing old man and child in "The Cycle of Spring" move ceremonially, even though with fine insight, the artist has made the petals, the grass, the shrub, the hair and beard of the old man, and the clouds all move in a cosmic dance in the same direction.

There is no abandon either of despair or joy in these, or any other, of Mr. Haldar's pictures; for abandon means exaggeration in one or other direction and a denial of the other side of the question. To attain to intellectual virtuosity, Mr. Haldar and his fellows would have to shut themselves out from the thrill of "ânanda" (joy) that appears to flicker through every line of their work. To achieve emotional poignancy they would have to put the smoked glass of denial in their line of vision. Their work, as exemplified in that of Mr. Haldar, is at the point of poise between head and heart, escaping on one side the caparisoned frigidity of much of the intellectual art of Europe and, on the other, the sulphurous emotional heat

Eight





of the cinematograph grimace. A fine example of this poise is found in Mr. Haldar's "Râsalîlâ" [Vide Plate XVI] which was first seen at the December 1920 Exhibition of the Oriental Art Society in Calcutta and which I had the opportunity of meditating upon in October 1921 at Shântiniketan. Ostensibly it is a picture of a moonlight cloud moving across the sky. But superimposed on the cloud is a procession of figures in stately dance. In the centre is Shri Krishna playing on his flute, and before and after are Gopis (his girl-companions) drifting with him and with the cloud across the background of night. There is a solemn joy in every lineament of every figure—a spontaneity of chaste delight controlled by some ritual of beauty and truth, which because it is essential, has no sense of being imposed. We feel that the song of the procession is 'wise and lovely', as Shelley called the songs of Silenus, notwithstanding the ill reputation of the sylvan divinity. The loveliness of Mr. Haldar's 'Râsalîlâ' is on the face of it. Its wisdom is, as all wisdom should be, implicit and pervasive. It comes to us as the answer to the picture's challenge to the mind as to what perception of the mystery of the universe moved the artist to this requisite integration of mythology and





an artist born in Christian tradition were to paint a picture expressing what is wrapped up in the Hebrew poet's exclamation—"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth, His handiwork," he would touch the significance of 'Râsalîlâ'—with this difference, that to the inner eye of the Indian artist the cloud is not an objective manifestation of a quality of the creator, but is essentially himself, Purusa, the Divine energy, gives out the music of His creative desire, and Nature (prakriti) in all the alluring variations of one substance moves rhythmically in response. Our artist, if he were a poet in words, as he is in colours, could not sing, as Wordsworth did, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud.' To him there is no lonely cloud, for it is the dancing feet of the Lord of Love that speed them along the sky.

This is art at its highest, and therefore its proper work—the work of revealing (not merely uttering) the mystery of life; and it is characteristic of art at this level of significance that its mode is not symbolical but metaphorical. Elsewhere\* I have tried to set forth at length the differences in these two modes of expression in the

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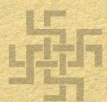
\* "Work And Worship," Chapter VII, (Ganesh & Co., Madras.)





arts. Here I can only refer to them to the extent that the reference may enable us to appreciate this element in Mr. Haldar's art. The symbolical method takes one thing to stand as a kind of code signal for another as the cross for self-sacrifice, or the monkey (by association in India with the story of the Ramayana) for fidelity. The symbol and the thing symbolised enter the mind separately. This is the mode of intellect as used by the English symbolical painters, G. F. Watts and Noel Paton. To say that a hero had a heart like a lion's is to put two hearts in the field of consciousness, the lion's heart being the symbol of the man's bravery. A peculiar result of this method is that the quality of the symbol assumes the place of importance in the mind. We think of the lion as superior in bravery to the man. The symbol usurps the place of the subject. If we understand this process we understand why dogma and external observance gradually take the place of realisation and life in the history of the religions. Metaphor, on the other hand, instantaneously identifies the visual figure and the thing signified. To say that a hero had a lion's heart is to telescope the figure of speech and the subject. Some transfer of quality from the figure to the subject takes place

Eleven





here also but speaking generally the metaphorical mode has less danger for the subject than the symbolical. We may state the difference in a phrase thus—a symbolism indicates something else; metaphor indicates something more.

There are three pictures of Mr. Halдар's which show this power of adding 'a little more (and how much it is!)' One is the picture of Shiva and Pârvatî (Pl. VI) depicting the incident of Shiva's coming in disguise to his consort and telling her things unfavourable to the character of her husband (himself disguised). Pârvatî refuses to believe the allegations and tries to break away from the story-teller. At this moment (which is the moment of the picture) the Lord of Creation reveals himself in his form to his Shakti (power). In the sky beyond a vista of the snowy Himâlayas, the crescent moon is so disposed as to rest on the head of Shiva thus entangling the Divine Being with the whole of creation. Here the artist accepts the traditional Hindu mythos, and makes his own addition. To the personal manifestation of divinity he adds the cosmic. In 'Dawn' he uses natural symbolism. A darkly draped and sleepy woman figure stands in front of a wide awake golden man-figure who is chapleted and





carries a flower. The man is saying something in the ear of the woman. We infer a command of departure. The title indicates the symbolism at one level, but there is an imitation in the picture to the contemplation of dawns besides those of a new day in the calendar—dawns in the heart when flower-bearing hope sent despair out of doors, dawns in the mind when illumination followed doubt and dawns deeper and vaster in the soul of humanity and the Universe. In "The Spirit of the Storm" Mr. Haldar is metaphorical. In the midst of a finely realised stormy sky there are flashes of lightning and a deluged rain. One feels as if raised to the dizzy and fascinating centre of a tropical cyclone. Then the cloud-shapes resolve themselves into the figure of a woman with hand outstretched flinging on to the thirsty earth, from the heart of cosmic solicitude for human well-being the boisterous benediction of the monsoon. One could follow out his idea in other pictures but exigencies of space forbid. Here also one could meet the obvious objection to reading into the pictures more than the artist intended. The philosophical and psychological fallacy involved in the objection may well form the substance of any study. In Mr. Haldar's case we are left in no

Thirteen





doubt as to this attitude to his art. It is set forth in his striking water colour entitled "Shilpîr Mohavanga" (The End of the Artist's Illusion) (Pl. XI), about which Mr. Haldar has given me the following note: 'An artist's object is not merely to create form. He has a higher aim namely to symbolise eternal Beauty and Truth through the medium of his creation. If what he creates fails to signify ideal Beauty and Truth his art becomes unbearable to him. The ideal and the real which are one in his mind become divorced in actual expression and he is ready to destroy that which has failed to give him true joy. When the Creator (Mahâdeva) observes untruth in the midst of His creation (which is Truth) He assumes the form of Rudra (the destroyer) to annihilate the falsehood. This picture represents a sculptor in the act of finishing his work. But in the very moment of its completion he destroys it for the image that has come out of the stone is not that which is in his mind it has failed to express the ideal Beauty and Truth, and has expressed instead the desire of the flesh.'

The late Sister Nivedita noted the metaphorical power of enlarged suggestion in Mr. Haldar's works and wrote as follows of "The Vinâ" (Plate IV).





"We have here a small work of indescribable beauty of drawing, colour and setting. The rich autumn tints yield to an equally rich blue overhead. The terrace roof, at nightfall or at dawn suggests vastness or solitude fit for the dreaming attitude and pensive air of the woman in the fore-ground. We can almost hear the faint sweet notes of the vînâ in "her hand as she seeks for the song of the heart."

The work of the Bengal artists has been criticised for its not being "true to nature." The criticism is pointless where it is applied to pictures of mythological personages who are "supernatural"; applied to certain of Mr. Halдар's pictures that rest on the solid earth there may be granted a few moments' justification of the charge of anatomical license—but if that few moments' space is employed in an attempt to realise the method and purport of Mr. Halдар's art as already set out by himself above, the charge will, I think, be withdrawn. Mr. Halдар is, as I have already said, a poet in colour, and he is entitled to a divergence from the strict "truth to nature" of photographic art as liberal as the divergence to which the poet in words is entitled from the strict canon of prose. No one speaks as poetry speaks. No one sees as poetical painting sees. "I





stood tiptoe upon a little hill" is a line of pure poetry but it was the poetry that stood tiptoe, not the poet. The tiptoe mood and vision ( in painting as in poetry ) must have tiptoe expression even though the poet or artist could no more stand on the tips of his toes than on the tips of his fingers.

Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar is just over thirty years of age, and, with a family heredity of artistic taste and achievement reinforcing the natural responsiveness of his own genius to the Râsalîlâ that found expression in Ajanta over a thousand years ago and in finding expression today in Bengal, should delight lovers of art with a long line of works—to which the exponents of the coming art criticism based on spiritual values may turn for inspiration and ratification.





**ANNOTATIONS ON THE  
ILLUSTRATIONS.**





PLATE I. SÎTÂ IN ASHOKA GROVE  
(Frontispiece)

The story is from the well-known episode of the Râmâyana, the Indian Illiad where Râvana the demon-king abducts the Indian Helen, Sîtâ, the wife of Râma, and confines her in a grove of Ashoka Trees (Jonesia Ashoka) hoping in vain to win her good graces. Sîtâ spends her days in tearful meditation with ample faith in her gallant knight to come and rescue her. The emotion of the theme is realised not so much in a skilfully drawn figure the curves of which perhaps endeavour to spell a crystalized tear drop the very symbol of grief but the colour scheme devises an accurate symbol for the mood of sorrow, in a pale russet, across which flashes the horizontal light, symbolizing Hope and Faith, while the Moon herself furnishes a worthy halo for this 'Beauty in distress.' For according to the Hindu traditions, the faithful wife when separated from her mate abjures all

Seventeen





manners of toilette or superficial aids to beauty.

The late Sister Nivedita's comment on the picture is worth quoting: "Sîtâ ought, undoubtedly, to have pre-eminence in Indian Art, like that of the Madonna in European. The very exaltation of their feeling for her seems, however, to deter our Bengali artists from attacking her portraiture with self-confidence necessary to success. Haldar's "Sîtâ" seemed to us the most successful attempt yet made at that subject."

## PLATE II. THE UNKNOWN VOYAGE.

This is one of the earliest pictures of the artist which helped to make his reputation. It was designed as a marriage present to a newly married couple. The new married life is symbolised in a youthful pair beginning a happy journey in a boat which sings in sweet music through the flute of the youngman to whose ear the beloved one pours her whispers of love never dreaming of the sorrow that lurks in the bosom of life or of the goal of the unknown voyage.

Eighteen





### PLATE III. YASHODÂ AND THE INFANT KRISHNA.

This is one of the earliest works of the artist illustrating the theme of the love of Yashodâ for her infant son well celebrated in Vaishnava Literature. It is said that the Indian Madonna's love for the Indian Bambino demonstrated one of the many forms of love viz., the "Vâtsalya rasa" or the parental affection through which the deity realises the love of his devotees. The mother is conceived in a stately figure the very Queen of Affection proud in possession of her love. The curves of her milking breast are repeated in the folds of her drapery, the moving lines of which emphasize the mobile depth of the mother's love. The many details of the ornaments and the furnitures help to secure the old classical atmosphere of the picture. The little black casket with a handle is the receptacle for collirium for the eyes of the Divine Child.

### PLATE IV. THE VÎNÂ.

The young Bengali girl, with her stringed Indian lyre, the Vînâ, is a very

Nineteen





convenient form for the artist for translating a very sweetly suggestive verse of Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore which is transcribed below the picture :  
" ki sur bāje āmār prāṇay Âmi jāni  
Âmār moni jāṇay." What melody stirs within me I only know and my own heart only knows ! Sister Nivedita's comment on the picture has already been quoted by Dr. Cousins.

## PLATE V. THE STORY OF KUNĀLA.

Like the picture reproduced in plates VII & XIII this one is also a large composition and perhaps demonstrates the fact that the members of the New School of Painting do not always confine their conceptions in miniature pictures. The story is given by Vincent Smith in his little monograph on Ashoka : Because he had beautiful eyes as lotus-buds, Kunāla the favourite son of Ashoka was blinded by his jealous step-mother and thus the prince wandered forth in misery accompanied by his wife. One day as Kunāla was begging in the street round the inner court of his father's palace singing in a sad sweet voice, King Ashoka heard him, and

Twenty





sending for the beggar recognized him as his own son. The aged king grieved over his son's misfortune and asked Saint Ghosa to restore the prince's eyesight. The Saint preached a moving sermon and collecting the tear-drops of the congregation in a golden vessel restored Kunâla's eyesight by washing his eyes by this portion of the milk of human sympathy. The finale of the story is translated by the artist in a very effective group posed with lot of dramatic invention and realised in appropriate atmosphere.

#### PLATE VI. SHIVA AND PÂRVATÎ.

Here the artist has drawn on Kalidas' epic poem "Kumâra Sambhava" ( The Birth of the War-god ) for his inspiration. The Divine Pair were living apart separated by a curse, and the Gods were anxious that they should unite in love in order to bring forth the War-God Kumâra. Through the mechanical machination of Cupid they designed an untimely break in the meditative trances of Shiva and brought about the meeting depicted in the picture. The coy young girl was abashed by the touch of Shiva. She wanted to go

Twenty-one





away—and yet she tarried. In the words of the Poet :—" Shailâdhirâja tanayâ na yayou na tatsthou." The artist here repeats his favourite device of using the Moon for a double purpose. The Moon is the ever present symbol of Shiva's divinity. It serves also to keep company with the neighbouring clouds which are also claiming the crescent from as their own.

### PLATE VII. "HEAVEN".

This is one of the three pieces of mural decoration which Mr. Halder was commissioned to execute for the pandal erected in Calcutta in 1910 for His Majesty King Edward VII on the occasion of the visit to India after the Coronation. The two other companion pictures executed by Bose and Appa were the "Earth" and "Water". In popular Indian imagination an Emperor is supposed to be the sovereign of "Three Worlds" "Swarga" (Heaven), "Marta" (Earth) and "Pâtâla" (the Water or the region below the Earth). The "Heaven" is pictured in the clouds where the Devas (the demi-gods) accompanied by the Apsaras (nymphs) and singing

Twenty-two





Kinnaras and Gandharvas (mythical beings, half-man and half-bird) have assembled to offer their welcome and benediction which are showered from above in the shape of the holy flowers and the 'amrita,' the nectar of heaven. The conventional figures, extremely fascinating in their decorative poses and phantasies, are borrowed from the models of the Ajanta frescoes. They are grouped in pairs but are spread over the canvas with remarkable balance and rhythm which harmonise with the movements of the cloud forms.

#### PLATE VIII. THE PRECIOUS GIFT.

This is inspired by Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore's poetical version in Bengali of the Story of Anâtha Pindada borrowed from Ayadâna Shataka, the hundred folk legends relating to the Buddha. Anâtha Pindada one morning woke up the citizens of old Shrâvasti with his cry for 'the best gift' (Shrestha dâna) that they could offer to the Buddha. He went his round with his begging bowl knocking at every door, but refusing golds and jewels and other valuables that were offered in plenty, none of which, he apparently regarded

Twenty-three

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as worthy of the Buddha, the Beggar par excellence. The gift par excellence, at last, came from a destitute woman ! She made her obeisance to the hermit and then hid herself behind a bush and gave up her only piece of covering which the disciple with great reverence accepted as the most precious gift worthy of his Master. For she gave her all and only such gifts are worthy of the Divine.

## PLATE IX. THE FLAME OF MUSIC.

The picture is an illustration of one of the most popular songs of Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore which runs as follows: "Tumi ye surer âgun lâgiye dile more prâne Se âgun chariye galo sav khâne, sav khâne!" "The Flame of Music with which Thou hast touched my life has spread, and spread, and spread everywhere." The source of the inspiration of music is pictured in a mythical form under the very halo of the Morning Sun. Her image recalls that of the Saraswatee the Indian Minerva with her Vinâ which here puts forth tongues of musical fire which leap

Twenty-four





into flames far and near through the medium of the poet's soul set aglow by the touch of the divine fire. The artist confines himself to only two "bars" of his palate—blue and red—so enemical in their chromatic values which under the magic spell of the artist's brush balance each other and seem to forget their quarrel as they mingle in a spiritual embrace to create a significant symbolism in colour.

#### PLATE X. THE WORSHIPPER.

It is a very sensitive pencil drawing of a Hindu worshipper who is making her obeisance (Pronāma) to the family Idol a portion of the shrine of which, lit up by the lamp is visible at the corner. The worshipper had just had her purifying morning bath and has not done up her hair—which flows down as she stoops in a rhythmic curve with her lotus offering. Her face is not visible but her devout mind is skilfully expressed in the sensitive gestures of her feet, her bending head, and her eloquent pair of hands. The study may have been suggested by and certainly recalls the well-known anonymous Bengali

Twenty-five

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song :—"Ogo devatâ ! âmar pâsân devatâ  
hridi mandira wâsi Tomâro charane  
uâjra Korechi jâ chhila kusuma râsi."  
Oh my God ! My God wrought of stone  
that liveth in the temple of my heart ! At  
thy feet I have emptied all the  
richness of my flower-offerings." "One  
might at first sight quarrel with anatomi-  
cal details but the quarrel dies down  
as one realises that every one of the  
pencilled lines is drawn with a single  
eye to the idea of obeisance as the lines  
of a driving wave converge to the  
breaking crest."

#### PLATE XI. THE END OF THE ARTIST'S ILLUSION.

It is a somewhat distant Indian  
version of the story of Pygmalion &  
Galatea. It is however a wholly  
fanciful idea on the part of the artist him-  
self and we cannot do better than quote  
his own comments on the conception.  
"The picture represents a sculptor in  
the act of finishing his work. But in  
the very moment of its completion he  
is forced to destroy it, for the image  
that has come out of the stone is not  
that which is in his mind ; it has failed  
to express the ideal Beauty and Truth.

Twenty-six





and has expressed instead the desire of the flesh." The end of the Image of Illusion may, perhaps, open the gates of a truer vision.

## PLATE XII. THE LOTUSES.

It is a large piece of water-colour depicting a group of lotuses in the water overlooked by the newly risen Moon in the evening. It is inspired by the old Indian classical convention well celebrated in Sanskrit poems that at Sun-down and on the advent of the evening, the lotuses droop their moon-blanchèd heads in utter grief of separation from their Radiant Lover, the Sun. "Kamalinî malinî divasâtyaye" runs the text of poetic convention; "the lotuses pale at the death of the day." The picture will easily recall many studies of the subject by the inimitable Japanese masters.

## PLATE XIII. RÂMA & GUHA.

This was the largest composition ever attempted by the artist (size 9' x 4'), the original of which was destroyed. The subject is drawn from the well-

Twenty-seven





known episode of the Râmâyana [Ayodhyâ Kânda, 50th Ch]. Râma in the course of his journey towards Ceylon came across a loving and a faithful soul—in the person of a Chandâla representating the meanest strata and the most despised section of the Hindu Society. The great Hero did not shrink from embracing him and making the best friend of one whose touch is said to defile the higher caste. The Hero is seen to honour his new friend whose family, in a very lively group, came, forward with offerings for the Blessed one. His brother Lakshmana does not quite like this friendship in 'low' life and appears to stand aloof. The episode may well be taken to represent the ideals of Indian social service—ideals which appear to have been lost sight of during the ascendancy of Bramhinism. The type of the figures and the whole ensemble are rich with suggestions from the Ajanta Frescos.

#### PLATE XIV. THE RAINY DAY.

The idea of a very miserable person in the very wettest day of her life is pictured with poignant realism in the person of a helpless, homeless, desolate

Twenty-eight





mother hugging her little one to her breast, the only warm corner in the rainy day, to protect him from the cutting blades of the heavy rain. The suppression of irrelevant details helps to emphasize the expression of the face stricken with sorrow too deep for tears yet tempered with a hope and a faith worthy of an Indian mother.

PLATE XV. "RÂSA LÎLÂ".  
(First version).

This is a version of a very old religious theme borrowed from the Vaishnava Scripture known as the Bhâgavata. The subject is well hackneyed in Rajput painting and has also been attempted by many members of the New School, including K. N. Mazumdar. The artist regards this as his "chef d'oeuvre" and his reputation must stand or fall by it. The picture reproduced in this plate is a preliminary study in a miniature size which he afterwards elaborated in the large composition reproduced in the next plate. The composition pictures Krisna, the Lord and the Lover of the Gopîs, the village maids of Vraja, who gave up their all and came to this mystic moon-dance known as the "Râsa-

Twenty-nine





Mandala." He danced and danced so quickly that every damsel thought He was by her side. But He was here, there, everywhere. Between every two maidens there was a Krishna, there being as many Krishnas as Gopis. The Divinity willingly responds to the wishes of His faithful lovers.

## PLATE XVI. "RÂSA LÎLÂ".

( Second version ).

In this larger version we discern important alterations. The "gopî" immediately to the left of Krishna in the miniature version of the last plate was a timid girl tremulously feeling for the touch of Krishna by her side. She was not sure if her prayers had fetched the Divinity. In the present version she has recognised that she has touched God and she is looking up. There is more faith in her eyes than in her hesitating steps. Her bejewelled feet are less courageous in approaching the Lover for whom the touch of her hand and the vision of her eyes carry more conviction.

## PLATES XVII & XVIII. RÂSA LÎLÂ.

( Details from the last Picture ).

Indeed if we concentrate on the ex-

Thirty





pressions of her face, as in this plate, we find that in contrast with the tremulous gestures of her hands, (the right hand touches only to recede and the left hand traces wonder) her courageous eyes are firmly set and leave no room for doubt that it is He. Yet if we follow the figuration of her whole body it easily spells a note of interrogation and contrasts graphically with the almost straightened resignation of the figure of the lady behind her back. The latter raises her joint palms in fervent faith and shuts her eyes in justified ambition to behold within one whom all her companions are only content in seeing without. In her simple though convincing gesture there is more feeling for a closer proximity to her God and Lover than that of her companion in front who is actually far away though in apparent contact with the Divine. The two figures on the right of Krisna playing on cymbals happily complete the rhythm of the magic circle. Notwithstanding a certain weakness of drawing, particularly in the central figure, the artist has succeeded in interpreting the gravity of his subject matter with lot of refreshing vision and intimate understanding of the spirit of Vaishnavite character of worship. There is not much colour

Thirty-one





in the original which may be fitly described as a symphony in Blue and White.

## PLATE XIX. THE GIRL & THE VÎNÂ.

This is one of the series of brush drawings charming in their poetry and suggestive in their description of a phase of Bengali Village life into which the artist brings a lot of colour without actually using any from his palette. Indeed in this series the artist imposes on himself a penance of colourlessness by confining himself to the monotone of sepia. The type is not borrowed from any actual model. Yet this "Girl with the Vînâ" is not entirely a fiction of the artist's imagination. She is seated with the Vînâ, yet she would not touch it. She is anxiously looking out for whom but her own Sweet-heart who must touch up the strings of her own heart before she can be inspired to touch the strings of her Vînâ which is only the reflex of the melody of her inner strings.

## PLATE XX. THE FLUTE PLAYER.

This is evidently a counterpart of the

Thirty-two



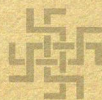


last picture. The youthful heart of the village swain must be full with love which he is blowing into the music of his leaf-made country flute, The wonderful empty spaces and the reticence and subjection of needless details offer very characteristic qualities for these richly endowed series of studies. In the last picture, beyond the blades of plant there are no other accessories to encumber the simple story of an empty heart which is graphically realised by the utter emptiness of the spaces in the picture. Here as in the series, following, all irrelevant accessories are ruthlessly suppressed leaving eloquent spaces to adorn the naked simplicity of the main theme. Here also the meadow and the mound are suggested by the peeping form of a plant which stoops over the elevation to overhear the young piper of Love of the new arcadia of a Bengal Village.

#### PLATE XXI.(A). STUDIES FROM VILLAGE LIFE.

The last subject is here repeated in a complicated and dramatic situation. The youth of fifteen has now attained manhood, and married and settled to a

Thirty-three





home life but he has smuggled the pipe of his youth into his adult life. We see him absorbed in his music, which has not lost its youthful melody, absolutely oblivious of the duties of married life. His spouse with the cares of daily life, suggested by the house-wife's basket, had perhaps come to wake up, by her sharp tongue, the 'idle one' still busy with his flute. But she has herself fallen a prey to the memory of the call of her early youth and cannot think of disturbing her piping mate to whom the earth is as green and the sky as rosy as on the day of their first meeting.

#### PLATE XXI (B). STUDIES FROM VILLAGE LIFE.

In this little vignette the adult housewife is made to dream of the rosy days of her own girlhood when she would go to the river twice everyday on the pretext of fetching water. The jar will be set down on the steps and await long long hours while she counted and recounted the petals of her lotus and then without any reason drop them in the water, in lines perpendicular to her drooping locks, as they kissed her bashful cheeks, to peep at her own reflection in the water.

Thirty-four





## PLATE XXII (A). STUDIES FROM VILLAGE LIFE.

Here we have a simple story of the typically simple life of the Bengal village folk. The bread-winner of the family starts out of his hut at daybreak with his frugal mid-day meal tied to his stick and is not expected to return from his work in the field before sun-down. The mother is left to look after her baby and the thousand little work and worries of her little household. She will presently pick up the up-turned jar to fetch water from the neighbouring tank.

## PLATE XXII (B). STUDIES FROM VILLAGE LIFE.

It is long past sundown and the familiar footsteps of the Sojourner in the morning has not returned on the cool floor of his mud-hut. The lonely housewife is anxiously peering into the distant shadows for a look of the familiar face. She has not tied up her hair, nor put fire into the homely chulâ, nor pasted her preparations for the evening meal. For she must serve up a hot dish for her mate after he returns. Oh! Why is he so late? The baby is getting so restless for

Thirty-five





his evening kiss. It is a simple and yet a poignant drama told by a few significant scratches of the artist's brush, without any skill or flourish. The colourist has sanctified his fast by a richly emotional linear worship.

### PLATE XXIII. THE SPIRIT OF THE STORM.

This is one of the artist's latest pictures executed in May 1922. The artist's own words furnish a very happy introduction to the picture: "I did it during the spell of hot weather at Shântiniketan. The heat was stifling, and no body could stir out for days. One day it so happened that all of a sudden a dark cloud glided over the sky and drove out the scorching sun, bringing a temporary relief from the terrific heat. The dark lady, rowing a boat, with hair flying in opposite directions, is represented as the soul of the rain-cloud which is trying to drive away the heat of the Sun. That is to say the picture represents the approaching monsoon. I generally ask Dr. Tagore to suggest some suitable name for my paintings and he very kindly finds titles for them. Sometimes he allows me to quote suitable passages

Thirty-six





from his poems. To this picture Dr. Tagore appended a line from one of his own songs of Varsâ-Mangal:

“O-go âmâr Shrâvan Megher kheyâ  
tarir mâjhi  
Ashru-bharâ purab hâwâr pâl  
tule âji

Udâs-hriday tâkâye roy  
Vojhâ tâhâr noy bhâri noy  
Pulak-lâgâ ai kadamber kebala sâji”.

#### TRANSLATION:

Oh ! my queen of the plying ferry of  
the Rain-clouds. She has spread for  
her sail the East-wind brimful of tears,  
And stares out with an empty heart  
With a load which is no more heavy  
Than that yonder bunch of Kadamba  
flowers with all their hairs thrilled on  
their ends.

#### PLATE XXIV. THE NEGRO PRINCESS.

For this picture also the artist's own words furnish appropriate annotation:  
“The Negro Princess is not borrowed  
from any historical episode. She is a  
creation of my own fancy. I simply  
imagined that there may have been  
somewhere some Mahomedan Prince  
who kept this pious Negro girl in

Thirty-seven





captivity. In her confinement in the harem she could find pleasure in nothing except reading over and over the pages of the Koran."

PLATE XXV. "RÂI—RÂJÂ" :  
OR THE DANCE OF KRISHNA.

The theme is borrowed from the love episodes of Râdhâ and Krishna and furnishes a companion picture to the "Râsa-Lilâ" (Plate XVI). Râdhâ passes through many trials of love and at last emerges as the Queen of the Loveland to whom Krishna himself is glad to render His willing homage. The village maids, the companions of Râdhâ, have assumed the dignity of ladies-in-waiting and are busy finishing the last touches on the toilette of the Queen, while the cowherd boys, the companions of Krishna approach with their music to announce the coronation of the Queen, headed by Krishna himself, in a rhythmic dance, with his flute.

PLATE XXVI. THE WATERFALL.

The artist himself has furnished the following commentary on the picture:

Thirty-eight





"A captive young prince standing near a parapet of the rampart of an old fort situated on the summit of a hill looking attentively towards a water-fall. The water-fall glides down, in a "clean drop", from a precipitous hill overlooking the fort. Though the prince seems to have fixed his gaze on the "fall" but in reality he looks beyond it at the vast distance of the infinite. Humanity sought for freedom ( "MUKTI" ) But alas ! he does not know where to find it. He generally goes for it to the material world, specially the one which he creates for himself and makes a strong fortified wall around him. He becomes blind and cannot see through it. In man a real clamour for truth and freedom comes at a certain age in youth. The youthful prince in this picture realises the truth through parable of the water-fall which is always moving and decaying and perhaps also saying to him, "Live for ever in this captivity? But alas! nothing can be kept for ever! All things move and pass in this world! Nothing vanishes though, but everything changes its course." He was captive; but his mind got loose like the water-fall and was soaring in the heaven of infinite thought. Though he is seen here surrounded by the strong stone

Thirty-nine





walls of the fort; it has revealed to him that nothing can be kept captive or materially owned in this world for ever.

### PLATE XXVII. THE CARESS.

This apparently insignificant drawing is a little masterpiece of the eternal love drama of the Mother and the Child. It is usual for the Madonna to pour all the caresses of her love on her little child,—the incarnation of her affection. Here the mother is pictured in a mood of indifference, as ignoring the baby,—whom her hands have forgotten to clasp. The little prince of love demands his royalty of kisses and wakes up the mother in the absent-minded girl by the sweet caress of the magic touch of his little finger.

### PLATE XXVIII. NATURE MYSTERIOUS.

No better commentary on the picture can be furnished than the following prose-poem contributed by Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, ~ as a translation in words of the thoughts suggested by





the picture :—

Thou sittest alone ever watching  
For someone we do not know  
In the twilight of endless meeting  
and departure.

Above in the sky a play goes on  
Of evasive gold and grey  
On the fringe of July clouds  
In the twilight of endless meeting  
and departure.

Thou sittest alone among the dreams  
At thy feet flows the fugitive water  
crooning its tune of tears,  
While the dead leaves drop to the dust  
And the new ones break out with  
life's tiding to the forest  
In the twilight of endless meeting  
and departure.





the picture -  
There stand alone even waiting  
For someone we do not know  
In the twilight of night as waiting  
and departing.  
Above the sky a day goes on  
Of endless gold and grey  
On the fringe of July clouds  
In the twilight of night as waiting  
and departing.  
There stand alone even waiting  
For someone we do not know  
In the twilight of night as waiting  
and departing.  
Above the sky a day goes on  
Of endless gold and grey  
On the fringe of July clouds  
In the twilight of night as waiting  
and departing.

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**PLATE II.**  
**THE UNKNOWN VOYAGE.**  
(Collection of Mr. H. Chowdhury A. R. C. A. Calcutta.)





PLATE II



THE UNKNOWN VOYAGE





**PLATE III.**  
**YASHODÂ AND THE INFANT KRISHNA.**  
(Collection of Dr. Coomarswamy, Boston.)





PLATE III



KRISHNA & YASHODĀ





**PLATE IV.  
THE VÎNÂ.  
(Colour Plate)**

**(Collection of Mr. Leonard Jennings, Chelsea, London.)**







و ای که به یاد تو می‌آید  
 و ای که به یاد تو می‌آید





**PLATE V.**  
**THE STORY OF KUNÂLA.**  
**(Collection of Mr. Prafulla Nath Tagore, Calcutta.)**





PLATE V



THE STORY OF KUNĀLA





PLATE VI.  
SHIVA & PÂRVATÎ.  
(Collection of the Hon'ble Mr. P. R. Das, Patna.)







SHIVA & PARVATI





**PLATE VII.  
HEAVEN.**

**(Collection of the Maharaja-dhiraja of Burdwan.)**



PLATE VII



HEAVEN





**PLATE VIII.**  
**THE PRECIOUS GIFT.**  
**(Collection of Mrs. J. J. Tacy, U. S. A.)**





PLATE VII



THE PRESCIOUS GIFT





**PLATE IX.**  
**THE FLAME OF MUSIC.**  
(Collection of Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Shantiniketan.)





THE FLAME OF MUSIC.





**PLATE X.**  
**THE WORSHIPPER.**  
(Collection of Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Shantiniketan.)





PLATE X



THE WORSHIPPER





**PLATE XI.**  
**THE END OF THE ARTIST'S ILLUSION.**  
(Colour plate)  
(Collection of Mr. O. C. Ganguly, Calcutta.)





PLATE XI



THE END OF THE ARTIST'S ILLUSION





**PLATE XII.**  
**THE LOTUSES.**

**Collection of Mr. Profulla Nath Tagore, Calcutta.)**





PLATE XII



THE LOTUSES





**PLATE XIII.**  
**RÂMA AND GUHA.**  
(After a photograph from the lost original.)





PLATE XIII



RAMA MEETING GUHA





**PLATE XIV.**  
**THE RAINY DAY.**

**(Collection of Mr. Prafulla Nath Tagore, Calcutta.)**





PLATE XIV



THE RAINY DAY





**PLATE. XV.**  
**RĀSA LĪLĀ.**  
**(First version.)**  
**(Collection of Mr. Prafulla Nath Tagore.)**







RÂSA-LÎLÂ (FIRST SKETCH)





**PLATE XVI.**  
**RÂSA LÎLÂ.**  
**(Second version.)**

**(Collection of Mr. Prafulla Nath Tagore.)**







RÂSA-LÎLÂ (SECOND VERSION)





**PLATE XVII.**  
**RÂSA LÎLÂ.**  
**(Detail.)**







RÂSA-LÎLÂ (DETAIL)





**PLATE XVIII.**  
**RÂSA LÎLÂ.**  
**(Detail.)**



PLATE XVIII



RÂSA-LÎLÂ (DETAIL)





**PLATE XIX.**  
**THE GIRL AND THE VÎNÂ.**  
(Collection of Mr. B. N. Treasurywalla, Bombay.)









**PLATE IX.**  
**THE FLUTE PLAYER.**









**PLATE XXI.**  
**STUDIES FROM VILLAGE LIFE.**  
(Collection of Mr. K. Telang.)





A



B

STUDIES FROM VILLAGE-LIFE





**PLATE XXII.**  
**STUDIES FROM VILLAGE LIFE.**  
(Collection of Mr. K. Telang.)





A



B

STUDIES FROM VILLAGE-LIFE





**PLATE XXIII.**  
**THE SPIRIT OF THE STORM.**



PLATE XXIII



THE SPIRIT OF THE STORM

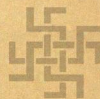
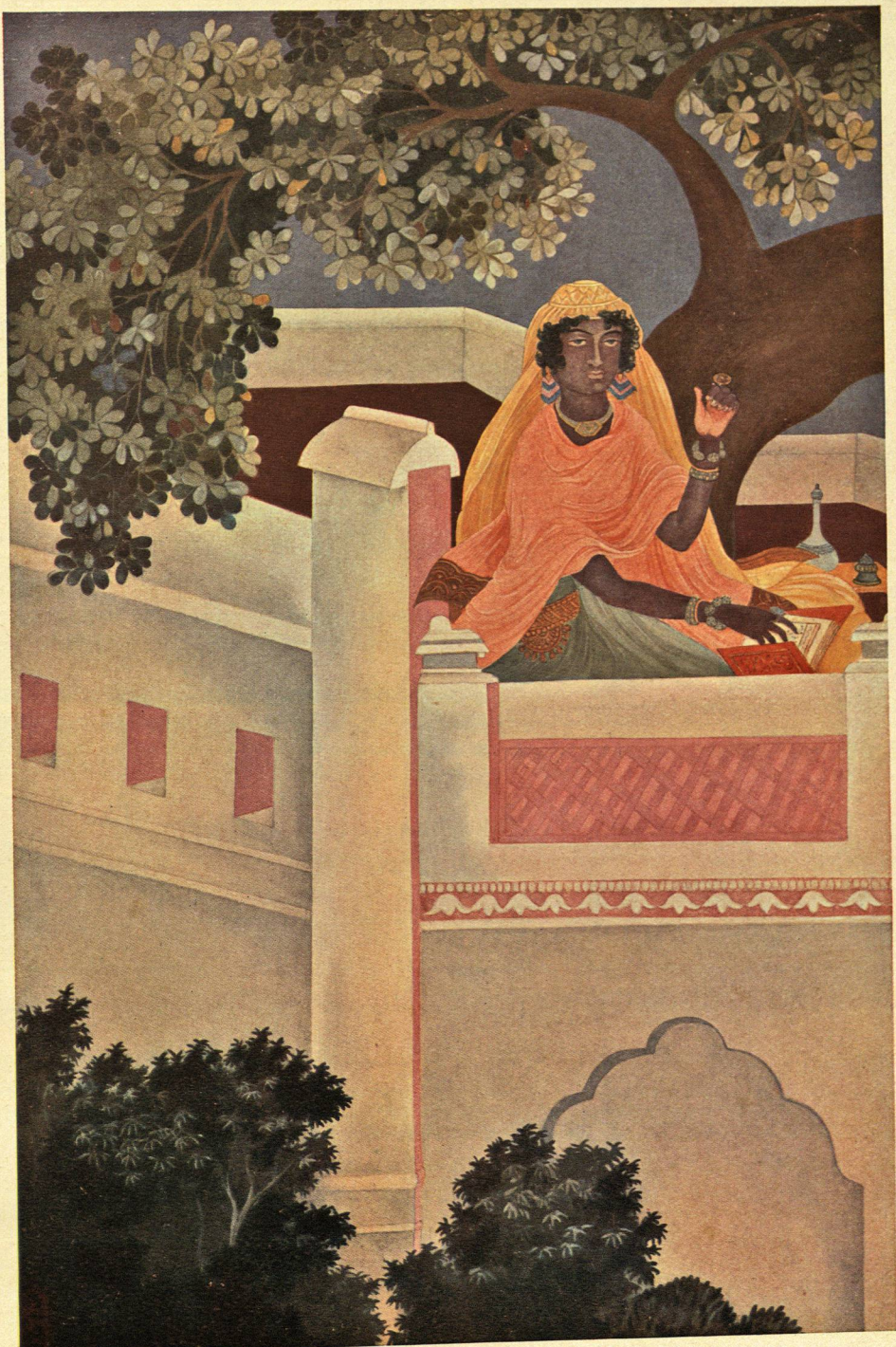




**PLATE XXIV.**  
**THE NEGRO PRINCESS.**  
**(Colour plate.)**







Printed in Germany

## THE NEGRO PRINCESS





**PLATE XXV.**

**RÂI-RÂJÂ.**

**(Collection of Mr. S. V. Ramesamy Mudaliar, Madras.)**







RÂI-RÂJÂ: THE DANCE OF KRISHNA





**PLATE XXVI.  
THE WATERFALL.**

**(Collection of Mr. S. V. Ramasamy Mudaliar, Madras.)**







THE WATERFALL.





**PLATE XXVII.**  
**THE CARESS.**  
(Collection of Dr. R. N. Tagore.)









**PLATE XXVIII.**  
**NATURE MYSTERIOUS.**  
(Colour Plate.)  
(Collection of Dr. R. N. Tagore).







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